

Nurse Practitioners (NPs) are nurses who have either completed a graduate nursing degree or received certification to provide preventive and medical care to individuals and families in association with a physician. In collaboration with a supervising physician, NPs can write prescriptions, dispense drugs, and order medications, tests and treatments in hospitals, clinics, nursing homes and other health facilities. In North Carolina, nurse practitioners are licensed as registered nurses and are jointly approved to practice as nurse practitioners by the Medical Board and the Board of Nursing.

One of the first three family nurse practitioner education programs in the nation was established in North Carolina. That program was developed specifically for the purpose of preparing these primary care professionals to practice in rural parts of the state. In 1975, NC became the first state to authorize NPs to perform medical acts, including diagnosis and prescribing medications. Today, nurse practitioners are recognized in every state and the District of Columbia and their scope of practice has been expanded to allow for independent practice in many settings for many roles. North Carolina currently has seven master's degree programs for NPs.

North Carolina's supply of NPs has closely mirrored that of the nation's. Since 1991, the state has experienced a rapid increase in the supply of NPs, which has grown more marked starting in 1995. There were no U.S. data for 2005 but in 2004 the number of NPs in the U.S. was higher than NC (Figure 36). In the early years (1979-1981) NPs had a fairly even metropolitan-nonmetropolitan distribution pattern, but the number of NPs per population has grown more rapidly in metropolitan counties since that time (Figure 37). The same is true for part and non-PHPSA counties, with non-PHPSA counties showing slightly faster growth. Nurse practitioners were more frequently working in whole-county PHPSAs between 1979 and 1983 but the ratio began to decrease in 1982 and in 1989 this was the least likely location for them to work. In 1992 this ratio began to increase but, with the exception of 1994, it has stayed below non- and part-PHPSA counties (Figure 38).

In 2005, only two counties, Gates and Camden, both located in the northeast, had no active NPs (Figure 39). However, the majority of the counties (63) increased their supply of NPs per 10,000 population between 2001-2005 (Figure 40).

Table 7: Summary Statistics for Nurse Practitioners in North Carolina

NPs per 10,000 Population		Total Active NPs	
1979:	0.48	1979:	279
2001:	2.25	2001:	1,845
2005:	2.82	2005:	2,440

Number of Nurse Practitioners per 10,000 Population in 2005

Metropolitan Areas:	3.17
Nonmetropolitan Areas:	2.03

For the 11 counties designated as whole county PHPSAs*: 1.62
 For the 27 counties designated as part county PHPSAs*: 2.45
 For the 62 counties not designated as PHPSAs*: 3.08

County Level Data

- # of counties increasing NP supply, 2001-2005: 63
- # of counties decreasing NP supply, 2001-2005: 36
- # of counties with no NPs in 2005: 2

*Persistent Health Professional Shortage Area